THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) and (b) A policy decision has been taken by the Government to privatise the provision of Internet Services and to end the monopoly of the VSNL over the Internet. Detailed guide lines and licensing conditions for Internet Service Providers were announced on 15.1.1998. As per the policy announced any Indian registered company having a foreign equity participation, if any, to a maximum of 49%, shall be eligible for award of ISP licence. However, the TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) vide its order dated 17.2.1998 invalidated the Internet Licensing Policy on the ground that Licenses, were not obtained. The Department of Telecommunications had filed an appeal against the decision of TRAI in the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi and the Court has pronounced its Judgment on the issue on 16.7.1998 and set aside the order of TRAI. The full text of the judgment is awaited. The Government will take further action in the light of the Court's judgment.

(c) As per above no foreign firm shall be eligible for award of ISP licences.

(d) Does not arise in view of (c) above.

Shifting of Postal Accounts Offices

3722. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether separate postal accounts offices of Assam Postal Circle Guwahati and North Eastern postal Circle, Shillong was created;

(b) if so, the objective and date of creation of those offices;

(c) whether necessary accommodation for the Assam Postal Circle Accounts office was offered at the old post office building, Guwahati; and

(d) if so, the reasons for not shifting the office from Calcutta defeating its objective, and when this is likely to be operated from Guwahati?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Question does not arise in view of reply to (a) above.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) The proposal for opening separate Postal Accounts Office at Guwahati is under consideration. However, no time frame has been fixed for the same.

Conference of SAARC Telecommunications Ministers

3723. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a Conference of SAARC Telecommunications Ministers was recently held in Colombo; and

(b) if so, what were major decisions taken therein?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Major decisions include;

To promote cooperation in the enhancement of telecommunication links and utilisation of Information Technologies within the SAARC region.

To minimise disparities with and among Member States in the telecommunications field.

To harness telecommunication Technology for the social and economic upliftment of the region and enhanced cooperation in technology transfer, standardisation and human resource development.

To evolve a coordinated approach on issue of common concern in international telecommunications fora.